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ABSTRACT

Studied were some cognitive aspects of the language development of a 2-year-old Puerto Rican boy who had been on the U.S. mainland 1 month. A Neo-Piagetian approach (developed by K. Witz and J. Easley) was used to study: language behavior as being embedded in more complex, unified systems; productivity of different structures and language patterns; and the increasing complexity of utterances. (LS)

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Some Cognitive Aspects of the Language Development of a Two Year Old Child

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Paper presented at the Council for
Exceptional Children's Annual Convention
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Some Cognitive Aspects of the Language Development of a Two Year Old Child

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The aim of this study is to explain in detail the growth of the total corpus of utterances and of usage patterns of utterances in a child from the one word to the two and three word stage in language development.

The subject of this study is Rey, a Puerto Rican boy, who came to the United States mainland one month before the collection of data started. Rey spoke only Spanish at the time. Later he began to learn English at the same time that he was learning Spanish. Recordings were made mainly at weekly intervals and the study includes the analysis of fourteen tapes (four videotapes and ten audiotapes).

The Neo-Piagetian approach developed by Witz and Easley (1975) at the University of Illinois in Urbana was used to study the data. Specifically, we looked at (a) language behavior as being embedded in more complex, unified systems which include such aspects as having the object in mind, pointing or showing the object, making sure that the person the subject is interacting with is looking to the object, etc. (such unified systems which underly language behavior are called action structures or characteristic ways of functioning), (b) productivity of different structures and language patterns, and (c) complexification of utterances as a product of the complexification of the original characteristic ways of functioning.

We found that the structure ese - pointing (= that used in Spanish with masculine objects) in a single-word utterance became productive first when used

in connection with animate objects (including animate objects referred to by feminine nouns), then to all objects; later the structure is used in the production of longer utterances. The cognitive-semantic generative aspect "animate" which underlays the use of ese-pointing was in part causally responsible for the fact that this structure became productive. The discovery of this animate aspect is important since according to Piaget it could be related to the latent animism in Rey which later develops into the concept of dynamics.

Later on the same aspect animate underlays the productivity of the structure ese + O (object) (+ pointing). In contrast to ese, esa (= that, for feminine objects) did not become productive. This may be due in part to the absence of the animate aspect.

Another structure studied was here-showing, calling. Two types of productivity were found in relation to the usage of here in two or more word utterances. One type of productivity is found in the here + O (object) structure and the other is exemplified by utterances such as no is here, mira here, ese here, etc., where a system of already productive operators (ese, no, mira) operates on here, is here, and right here to make the structure here productive.

With respect to the development of longer utterances, it was found that at least 73% of all of Rey's utterances at the two and three word stage could be considered as being embedded in characteristic ways of functioning, and the gradual complexification of Rey's utterances could be explained as being caused by expansion, differentiation, fusion, chaining, integration, etc., of characteristic ways of functioning (action structures).

Finally, it was suggested that utterances such as mira el nene and the girl which appeared in the last tape, require more of a comprehension or "holding in

mind" of the whole situation and a higher level of cognitive organization. Such utterances seem to show the beginning of a new stage or level in language development and further research is needed to explain this level.

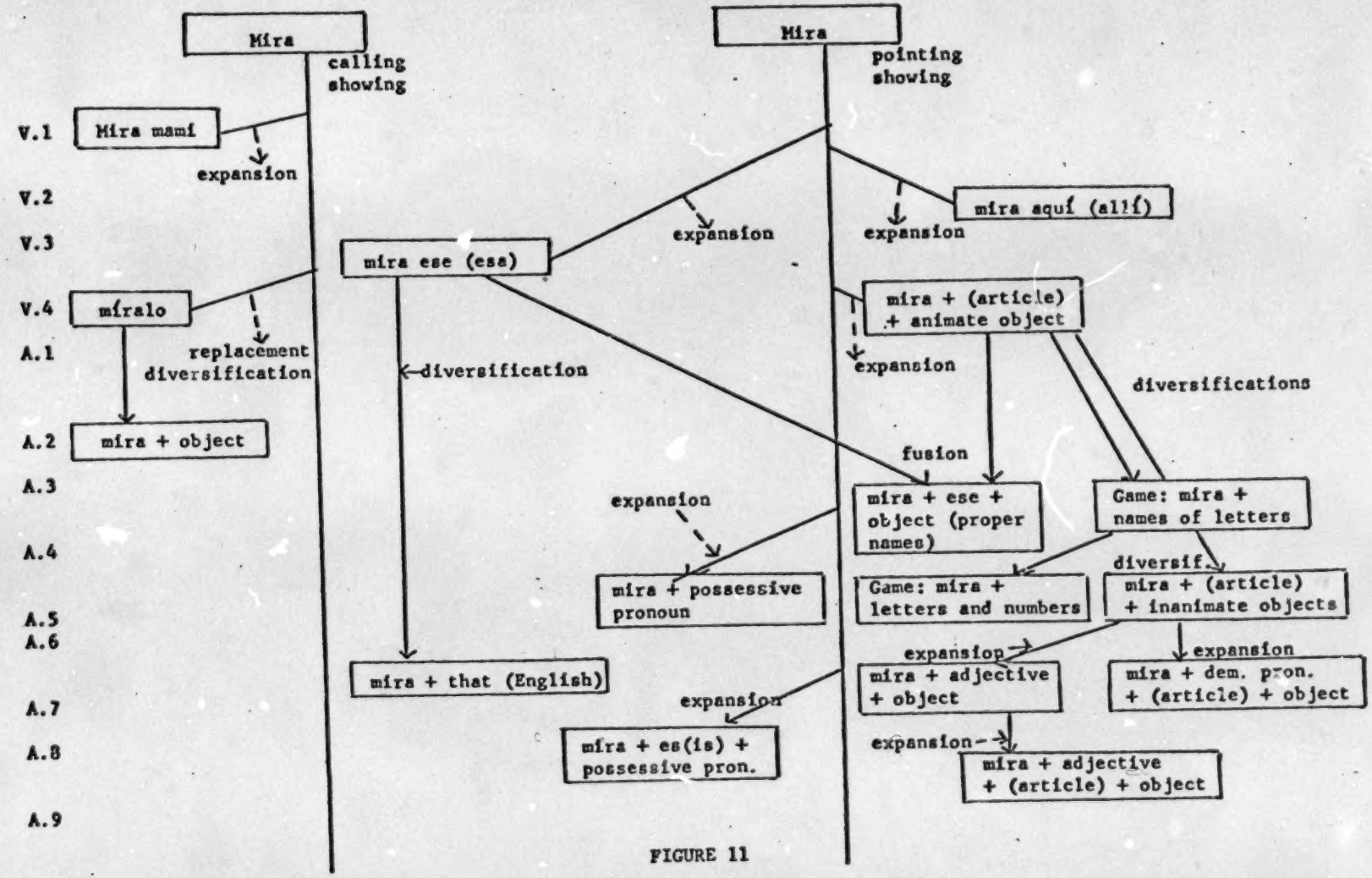

FIGURE 11

Development of Mira up to Audiotape 8

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